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Nationalism and Dictatorship

The 1982 Falkland Islands Crisis¹

The goal of this paper is to re-examine the circumstances of the Falkland Islands crisis, caused by the Argentine annexation of the archipelago in 1982. It challenges the popular belief that the Falklands invasion was only aimed at distracting the society from the poor conditions of living caused by the deteriorating economy and lack of democracy. The paper takes into consideration a third factor: nationalism of the Argentine armed forces. The article takes both the domestic and international contexts of the Falklands crisis into consideration and presents how nationalist attitudes of the Argentine military influenced the Falklands conflict in 1982.

Key words: Argentina, Falkland Islands, nationalism, military dictatorship, territorial dispute, United Kingdom.

1. Introduction

The British-Argentine dispute over the Falkland Islands, called the *Islas Malvinas* in the Spanish-speaking world, dates back to the time of the discovery of the archipelago. The lack of agreement as to the name of the discoverer led to the development of two versions of history that differs among the British and the Argentine people. According to the Argentines, the islands were discovered by Spaniards. The British claim that the islands of the archipelago were first sighted by English sailors (Metford 469; Freedman 3). The Falklands have been a British territory since 1833, when the crew of the HMS Clio took over the islands (Gustafson 23). The Argentine people have since been trying to claim the territory, to no avail, yet they have still never acknowledged their loss of sovereign rights to the archipelago. The majority of Argentine society, including elite groups within the country, continues to believe that the Falkland Islands were their own territory, illegally occupied by the United Kingdom (Etchepareborda 54).

¹ Funding for the research was received from Polish National Science Centre on the basis of the Decision No. DEC-2015/19/N/HS5/00004. I gratefully acknowledge this support.

The tension surrounding control over the Falkland Islands peaked during a period of military dictatorship in Argentina (1976-83), also known as the National Reorganization Process. It was one of the most brutal Latin American regimes of that time, responsible for the deaths and disappearance of thousands of people. The generals believed in their messianic mission to save Argentina and secure its rightful position in the world ("Bases para la intervención" 14). The decisions they made at that time thus had a deep ideological bias. On 2 April 1982, the Argentine army launched an armed attack on the Falkland Islands, annexing them as a result. It led to an immediate response by the United Kingdom, whose political leaders decided to reclaim the archipelago. The Falklands war ended with a British victory in June 1982, resulting in the death of almost 1,300 people and leading to significant financial losses for Argentina (Floria, García Belsunce 264-65).

The Argentine military who decided to reclaim the archipelago not only violently repressed its people but also plunged Argentina into economic crisis. Therefore, there is a belief supported by scholars and analysts that the Falklands issue was used as a political tool in order to redirect social attention away from the economic collapse and poor living conditions (Oakes 432; Hastings, and Jenkins 1983: 45-46). As Goebel (194) states, seeing the Falklands crisis as a result of Argentina's domestic problems has its roots in British press and diplomatic reports, which even before the Falklands War had reduced the conflict to being merely a result of Argentina's social and economic instabilities. Such conclusions, even if well-grounded, fail to take into consideration the specific nature of the Argentine dictatorship itself – the authoritarian, almost exclusively military character of the regime, and the very strong ideological identification of the dictators, who shared a common set of nationalistic beliefs.

The paper re-examines the circumstances of the Falklands crisis. It identifies both international and domestic factors behind the annexation and elaborates on the course of action that led to the attack. The author believes that societal pressure was not the core reason behind the decision to reclaim the islands. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to challenge two common beliefs regarding the Falklands crisis:

- 1) that it was a sole consequence of economic instability in Argentina,
- 2) that it was only planned to divert attention away from the social frustration caused by deteriorating living conditions and the lack of democracy.

The article intends to show that the actual causes that led to the Argentine invasion were broader. The author believes that the main factor behind the decision to invade the archipelago was the nationalism of the Argentine armed forces. In other words, the decision to annex the Falklands was largely made due to an ideologically biased perception of the international political environment, which prevented the military from making rational choices.

The paper uses qualitative methods. It is mostly based on archival research based on the Argentine documents evaluating the causes of the Falklands War, which are annexes to the *Rattenbach Report* on political, military and strategic responsibilities in the South Atlantic conflict. The report was prepared between 1982 and 1983, at the request of the ruling junta.

Apart from the primary sources, multiple secondary sources comprised of academic articles, books, and newspaper articles were also used in the research process.

The paper is structured as follows. The first section will elaborate on Argentine territorial nationalism with a focus on the military dictatorship of 1976-83 and the

Falklands case. The second section will present the external factors that shaped the Argentine perception of the Falklands issue during the National Reorganization Process. The third section, in turn, will focus on the domestic political factors that influenced the decision to reclaim the islands. The fourth section will elaborate on the 'Davidoff incident' that led directly to the Argentine annexation of the Falklands. The fifth section will focus on the Argentine military operation, the British response to it and its consequences. The last section will present the findings of the paper.

2. Argentine territorial nationalism and the Falklands issue

Argentine territorial nationalism boils down to perceiving the state within historical, or even ideological borders and promoting the state's territorial interests that may go beyond the actual frontiers. According to Carlos Escudé (141), Argentine nationalism with regard to territory is rooted in a shared misperception of territorial losses suffered by Argentina during the nineteenth century. Buenos Aires, the capital city of the Argentine Republic, had previously been the capital of the Spanish Viceroyalty of the Río de la Plata. This led the Argentine people to believe that the Argentine Republic was the direct successor to the Viceroyalty, particularly in terms of territory. Nevertheless, the independent Argentina, despite being the second largest country in South America, could not compare itself in size with the Spanish colony. Therefore, the countries that had been a part of the Viceroyalty of Río de la Plata – Uruguay, Paraguay, and Bolivia – were perceived by the Argentines as territorial losses. Similarly, the fact that Argentina was forced to share the southern lands with Chile was perceived as a huge territorial loss. The Argentines believed that their country should have had a claim to the whole area south of the River Bío-Bío, despite the fact that the Spanish crown has never exercised effective power over the whole Southern Cone region. This 'geopolitical dissatisfaction' of the Argentine people was exacerbated in 1833, when the British invaded the Falkland Islands – a small archipelago located in the South Atlantic that had been officially taken over by Argentina in 1820. Compared to other territorial claims, the Falklands may be perceived as a real loss, as the Argentine state had made an actual, albeit failed, attempt at settlement on the islands. (Hoffmann, and Mingo Hoffmann 71-73).

Escudé (156) stressed that the misperception of losses, of which only the Falklands case may be defined as a justified grounds for complaint, made the Argentine people very sensitive to territorial disputes. Among those whose sense of loss was particularly strong were members of the Argentine armed forces, traditionally very independent and influential within society, including in relation to the civil authorities. In contrast to armies in most Western countries, Argentine soldiers were responsible not only for maintaining external security, but domestic security as well. By launching military campaigns in its northern and southern territories, the armed forces contributed to the consolidation of the national territory in the 1870s and 1880s. These achievements made the military a social elite, highly respected in society (Forte 103). On the other hand, the military's commitment to the territorial shape of the country made them highly prone to accepting the rhetoric of loss and

geopolitical dissatisfaction (Villegas 193-96). Such an attitude, combined with the growing sense of personal responsibility for the state, made the armed forces one of the most nationalistic structures in Argentine society.

In the 20th century, the military's way of manifesting its concern for the state was to intervene and remove civilians from power. The 1976 coup that overthrew the government of María Estela Martínez de Perón and started the National Reorganization Process was the sixth in Argentina since 1930. Apart from its exclusively military character, the National Reorganization Process was characterized by very strong ideological identification of its leaders. Indeed, the last military dictatorship in Argentina was a strongly nationalistic project. The priority of strengthening the Argentine national organism was confirmed numerous times in documents published by the armed forces. It is enough to say that in one of the "Basic Documents" of the National Reorganization Process, the "Document setting forth the intents and fundamental goals of the National Reorganization Process", the words "national" and "nation" are repeated nine times – more frequently than any other word. ("Acta fijando el Propósito"). Referring to the national state and its needs allowed the military to justify the course of action they took. In their ideology the dictators combined traditional Argentine nationalism with new elements that resulted from their own experiences. Their nationalism was complex and visible at every level of social activity. However, its impact was particularly strong in relation to the national territory (Goebel 194).

One of the characteristic elements of the military's ideology, typical for nationalist thought, was the adoption of the organic concept of the state. The military perceived the state not only as a primal being, but also as a living organism (Finchelstein 153). The organic concept bonded the Argentines with their territory, perceived as an area for them to live. Nevertheless, the misperception of territorial losses throughout history made the military understand this bond in a particular way. When defining the Argentine soil, they were not referring exclusively to the areas legally controlled by the state, but also to the territories that had been taken from them in the nineteenth century (Villegas 195-96). According to this view, the Falkland Islands were an inseparable part of Argentine national territory. Therefore, as Admiral Jorge Anaya (264) pointed out, any armed annexation of the archipelago cannot be regarded as an illegal use of force, but rather as justified self-defense. The dictators stressed that the United Kingdom was guilty of military aggression in 1833, which gave the Argentine state a legal right to respond. Referring to Saint Augustine, they saw the potential armed annexation of the Falklands as a classic example of a 'just war' – aimed at regaining an illegally seized territory and conducted without endangering civilians, in order to achieve peace (Langan 19-38).

3. International contexts of the Falklands crisis

According to Resolution 2065 of the United Nations General Assembly from December 1965, Argentina and the United Kingdom were obliged to conduct bilateral negotiations aimed at peaceful settlement of the Falklands dispute (United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 2065...). However, in the 1970s, the negotiations with the United Kingdom over the sovereignty of Falklands reached a state of deadlock.

An opportunity to make fresh progress appeared in 1979, when the Conservatives led by Margaret Thatcher came to power in the UK. A group of members of the ruling party, mainly officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) believed the Falklands to be a burden for the United Kingdom – it was a distant territory with shrinking population and low economic potential. In order to maintain the archipelago, the government was forced to spend substantial amounts of money, and still could not afford a sufficient military presence on the islands (Freedman 85). Such views were shared by Nicholas Ridley, the Minister of State at the FCO, responsible for the Falkland Islands. Between 1979 and 1980, he held several meetings with Argentine officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During the course of bilateral talks between Ridley and the Argentine Minister, Commodore Carlos Cavándoli, an interesting proposal for resolving the Falklands issue was presented by the British officials. It consisted of a leaseback plan involving the immediate transfer of Falklands' sovereignty to Argentina, followed by the leasing of the Islands to Argentina for 99 years. Such a long transition period would have ensured a smooth transition of the islands' status, taking into account the well-being of the British citizens living on the Falklands (Freedman 99-100).

The proposal developed by Ridley was positively received by the Argentines. Despite objections from some members of the Cabinet, Margaret Thatcher agreed to present the project to the Falkland Islanders – the government was convinced that no decisions on the status of the archipelago could be made without consent of the people living there. However, it soon turned out that there was no such consensus among the Islanders. When visiting the Falklands in November 1980, Ridley noted that the younger generation was aware of the need to stabilize relations with Argentina. However, during the debate in the Legislative Council of the Falkland Islands, the loyalists were the most eager to present their position. Therefore, at the end of the debate, most of the residents remained undecided ("Anexo II/13" 77-94). A month later, the proposal to relinquish sovereignty over the Falkland Islands was very badly received by the British House of Commons (HC Deb cc128-34). According to members of the Cabinet, the debate in the House was highly emotive and the Islanders' hostility to Ridley's approach was exaggerated (Franks 23). Despite this, during the bilateral negotiations with Argentina in February 1981, the British opted for a ten-year freeze on talks on sovereignty of the Falklands and maintaining the *status quo*. The annual Argentine-British high-level talks were to be maintained ("Anexo II/14" 95-99).

The failure of the long and substantive negotiations resulted in a change of attitude on the part of the Argentine government, which had previously been very open to the British proposal. A flexible position was replaced by sharp rhetoric from the Argentine armed forces. In July 1981, the newly appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs, Oscar Camillón, sent a formal note to his British counterpart, Lord Carrington, in which he called upon the United Kingdom to return to the negotiating table. He referred to the Falklands' status as an "unacceptable and unsustainable anachronism that provokes political and moral frustration of the Argentine nation" ("Anexo II/16" 103-105). However, as Moro (7) rightly points out, the British, unlike the Argentines, did not consider the Falklands to be a matter of great concern and were not willing to take the protests of a Latin American dictatorship, one accused of human rights violations, into consideration. Such an attitude only sought to encourage the

Argentine military to consider alternative methods of resolving the ongoing territorial dispute.

Another argument for the Argentine military to take a more forceful approach to the Falklands was the domestic situation in the United Kingdom. The beginnings of Margaret Thatcher's premiership were marked by serious economic, social and political problems. The state was in recession, inflation had reached double digits, and almost two million Britons were unemployed. Thatcher's policies evoked strong reactions from affected groups, especially among the working class and with Republicans in Northern Ireland in particular. Support ratings for the government were at a low point. What is more, reductions in military expenditure under the Labour Party government in the 1970s had led to a visible decline in the British Armed Forces. At the beginning of the 1980s, many perceived the UK as a former global power that had given up its dominant position in the world by adopting an ineffective foreign policy. In her memoirs, Margaret Thatcher (146) recalled the early 1980s:

The tacit assumption made by British and foreign governments alike was that our world role was doomed steadily to diminish. We had come to be seen by both friends and enemies as a nation which lacked the will and the capability to defend its interests in peace, let alone in war.

The drop in military spending resulted in a reduction in Britain's maritime presence on the high seas and oceans. In the early 1980s, the British Ministry of Defense recommended selling off or scrapping about one-third of the Royal Navy's surface fleet, including aircraft carriers and landing and transport vessels (Anderson 10). The only ship that was stationed near the Falklands was the HMS *Endurance* – an icebreaker with minimal armaments. Moreover, according to the decision of the Minister of Defense, the vessel was to be withdrawn from the South Atlantic (Anderson 12). The British garrison stationed at the Falkland Islands ranged from 40 to 100 people. As the local airport was not prepared to receive heavy military transport aircraft, a rapid transfer of troops was practically impossible.

These circumstances allowed the Argentine dictators to draw two conclusions – firstly, that the military operation to reclaim the Falklands was feasible, and, secondly, that were it to be successful, the possibility of military response by the UK was very low.

Another important factor shaping the military's perception of the Falklands issue was the potential attitude of the United States. Under Ronald Reagan's presidency, bilateral relations between Argentina and the US improved significantly compared to Jimmy Carter's time in office (Feldman 2). General Leopoldo Galtieri, one of the members of the military junta, was a keen supporter of closer relations between the two countries. As a graduate of the US Army School of the Americas (now the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation), he strongly believed the United States to be the undisputed leader in a global struggle against leftist ideologies. Close anti-communist cooperation between Argentina and the US, mainly in Central America, led the dictators to see their alliance as strong and unquestionable (Armony 70). As the Argentine Minister of Foreign Affairs Nicanor Costa Méndez stated, the military believed that Argentina was too important for the United States to lose as a partner. Therefore, the dictators assumed the US would support their government unconditionally – also in the case of a potential conflict between

Argentina and the UK. Moreover, according to the Argentines, the Reagan administration could not afford a war between two of its allies ("Declaración testimonial del Doctor Nicanor Costa Mendez" 643-44). The generals perceived their alliance with the United States as a guarantee of a moderate British response in the event of any potential military action by Argentina (Burns 143-44). The Argentines were also convinced that international law was on their side – the United Nations having regularly called for negotiations on the issue of Falklands sovereignty, with the one party that had been refusing to talk being the United Kingdom (United Nations General Assembly, Resolution 2065...; Resolution 3160...; Resolution 31/49...).

4. Domestic contexts of the Falklands crisis

The failure of negotiations with the United Kingdom coincided with the rise of radicals within the Argentine armed forces. The position of the moderate President Roberto Eduardo Viola was weakening under the growing influence of General Leopoldo Galtieri, a member of the military junta and the leader of a conservative faction in the army known as "the Falcons". Indeed, in December 1981, Galtieri replaced Viola as the President of Argentina. In the same year, the new Commanders-in-Chief of the Air Force, Brigadier Basilio Lami Dozo, and of the Navy, Admiral Jorge Isaac Anaya, joined the military junta. For the new leaders of the regime, and especially for Admiral Anaya, the British attitude towards the Falklands issue was not only incomprehensible but also deeply offensive (CAERCAS 19).

When speaking of the domestic factors behind the decision to reclaim the islands, it is important to stress one tendency that was characteristic of the Argentine military, resulting from their strong nationalist leanings. As Lieutenant Colonel Juan Carlos Melián Massera states, in order to self-legitimize the regime, the generals needed their policies, both domestic and foreign, to be based on "national causes" (*causas nacionales*) – issues deeply rooted in Argentine national identity that could be linked with the current political situation. The military believed that their mission as leaders of the state was to fulfill the aspirations of the Argentine people, including those related to territorial power and integrity. Efforts aimed at resolving Argentina's territorial disputes were perceived as a means of demonstrating that the military government understood the people and their needs. ("Entrevista realizada a Melián Massera, Juan Carlos") One should remember that in Argentina 1980 and 1981 were years strongly marked by the Papal mediation on the Beagle conflict with Chile. The two countries managed to avoid war, but relations between Chile and Argentina remained tense. Based on the progress of the mediation process, the Argentine dictators anticipated that the Pope would be more willing to side with their neighbor and grant the disputed territory to Chile (McClure 7). The lack of certainty of success encouraged the dictators to focus on another "national cause" that would define the National Reorganization Process.

However, it is important to stress that the idea of an armed annexation of the Falkland Islands was present among the Argentine military, especially the Navy, much earlier than in the 1980s. According to Admiral Jorge Anaya, such proposals were already articulated in the 1960s, when the Navy was headed by Admiral Benigno Varela ("Declaración testimonial del almirante (r.) d. Jorge Isaac Anaya" 733).

Furthermore, Anaya himself was responsible for preparing military plans for the annexation of the Falkland Islands in 1976, when acting on the orders of Admiral Emilio Eduardo Massera ("Declaración testimonial del vicealmirante d. Juan José Lombardo" 57). Therefore, the idea of launching a military action to reclaim the Falkland Islands should be seen in a long-term context. The fiasco of bilateral negotiations combined with the domestic problems of Thatcher's government at the beginning of the 1980s was perceived as an opportunity to resolve the issue once and for all.

It is also worth remembering that 1983 was the year that was to mark the 150th anniversary of the "British occupation" of the Falkland Islands. As Captain Gustavo Breide Obeid claims, there was a strong need to make a symbolic gesture and remind the Argentine people of this fact ("Entrevista realizada a Breide Obeid, Gustavo").

Such a need was shared by representatives of all three branches of the Argentine armed forces, but was especially common among the Navy. According to Admiral Anaya, it was necessary to develop an alternative to negotiations in case the United Kingdom continued to refuse to discuss sovereignty of the Falkland Islands. Already in mid-December 1981, Anaya addressed his Chief of Naval Operations, Vice Admiral Juan José Lombardo, with the task of preparing a plan to seize the Falkland Islands from the British. Lombardo's assignment was strictly confidential – he was not supposed to discuss the issue with anyone apart from four high-ranking admirals. According to the written order that Lombardo received from Anaya, the plan was to be prepared by 31 March 1982 ("Anexo II/13" 77-94). Shortly after the conversation with Lombardo, Admiral Anaya went to see General Galtieri to share his view about the need for an alternative to negotiations and ask him to support the Navy's plan. The Army's Commander-in-Chief agreed without hesitation – Galtieri and Anaya were close friends who had known each other for years. Both the General and the Admiral agreed on the need to strengthen the message about national and political goals of the National Reorganization Process ("Declaración testimonial del vicealmirante d. Juan José Lombardo" 60). However, according to Cardoso et al. (29-30), a favorable attitude towards the Navy's plan was one of the conditions to receive Anaya's support for Galtieri's attempts to remove General Viola from the presidency and take over the office (which indeed happened in the same month). Apart from supporting Anaya's plan, Galtieri decided to appoint his Commander of the Fifth Corps, General Osvaldo Jorge García, to join Lombardo in his efforts to develop a plan to reclaim the Falklands. On 29 December 1981, Brigadier Sigfrid Martín Plessl joined Lombardo and García on a special Working Commission founded to prepare a plan for annexation of the Falklands. Despite working on an actual plan to regain control of the islands, military action was still being considered as an alternative at that time ("Declaración testimonial del almirante (r.) d. Jorge Isaac Anaya" 773).

However, after the fiasco of Ridley's leaseback proposal, members of the junta were convinced that the British would never agree to a change in status of the Falkland Islands, thus any attempt at negotiation would be doomed to failure. From their point of view, the only means of convincing the United Kingdom to return to the negotiating table was to change the circumstances and present the British with a *fait accompli* ("Anexo III/5", 297-301). The Working Commission estimated that the Argentine armed forces would need at least several weeks to implement the plan.

According to Brigadier Lami Dozo ("Declaración testimonial del brigadier general (r.) d. Basilio Arturo Ignacio Lami Dozo" 810), they did not consider the annexation to be even theoretically possible before mid-May 1982. On 16 March 1982, the junta accepted the documents prepared by the commission and ordered the Joint Staff of the Argentine Armed Forces to develop the Military Strategy Directive (*Directiva de Estrategia Militar*, DEMIL) and the second Schematic Plan of Campaign (*Plan Esquemático de Campaña*) (CAERCAS 29). According to the provisions, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were to have at least a few weeks to prepare the documents. However, the military were forced to work at a faster pace due to events that occurred only a few days later, commonly referred to as the "Davidoff incident".

5. Direct causes of the crisis – the "Davidoff incident"

On 19 March 1982, a group of Argentine scrap metal merchants travelling on board the transport ship ARA Bahía Buen Suceso landed on South Georgia, an island belonging to the Falkland Islands dependency. They were working for the company Georgia del Sur S.A., whose director, Constantino Davidoff, was known for purchasing old whaling equipment from both British and Argentine partners. Contrary to the recommendations that the merchants had received from the British Embassy, they went directly to the port of Leith, not to the scientific base in Grytviken, where they were to report to local authorities. Once *in situ*, they engaged in a provocative action against the United Kingdom by hanging Argentine flags and firing a few shots (Yofre 1969). The incident led to an immediate reaction on the part of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government. The British Ambassador in Buenos Aires, Anthony Williams, delivered an official protest to the Argentine Minister of Foreign Affairs Nicanor Costa Méndez. The military government distanced itself from the events on South Georgia, noting that Constantino Davidoff was a private entrepreneur whose activity was familiar both to the Argentine and British authorities. Indeed, the incident which took place in March was not the first such visit by Davidoff's employees to South Georgia. The merchants went to the island twice in 1981 – in December 1981 on board the Argentine icebreaker ARA Almirante Irizar and in February 1982 using a privately chartered transport yacht ("Declaración testimonial del Doctor Nicanor Costa Méndez" 639).

However, it is important to remember that distancing itself from the March incident did not mean that the Argentine military government did not have their own plans for South Georgia. In fact, Argentina has maintained a claim to the sovereignty of South Georgia since 1927. According to Vice Admiral Lombardo, in the last months of 1981, the Navy had started to develop a plan for an operation known as "Alpha" to be conducted in South Georgia. The plan was to use one of Davidoff's expeditions as a cover to establish a secret Argentine base on the island. It should be noted that such a secret base had already been functioning on the island of Thule, a part of the South Sandwich archipelago, since 1976. Despite the Navy's aspirations, due to the progress of the Falklands plan, Operation Alpha was suspended in the first half of March 1982. Therefore, the expedition by the merchants from *Georgia del Sur S.A.* was not related to any plan of the military government ("Declaración testimonial del vicealmirante d. Juan José Lombardo" 70). Nevertheless, it must be

noted that the Argentine Navy continued to look upon Davidoff's plans in a positive manner – as already mentioned, the merchants were transported on board the Argentine ship ARA "Bahía Buen Suceso" (Cardoso et al. 110).

The Argentine rejection of the protest resulted in a decision to send the Royal Navy ice patrol vessel HMS Endurance to South Georgia. The 22 Marines on board the ship received orders to evacuate any Argentine present on the island ("Declaración testimonial del vicealmirante d. Leopoldo Alfredo Suárez del Cerro" 159). In response, on 23 March, the Argentine junta decided to dispatch the transport ship ARA Bahía Paraíso in order to protect the Argentine citizens in South Georgia ("Anexo IV/5 479-502). Minister Costa Méndez informed Ambassador Williams that the Argentine merchants would not leave the port of Leith and that there would be no permission to remove them by force ("Anexo IV/9" 518). The British responded by sending more units to the island – resulting in an escalation of the crisis ("Georgias – la crisis en un punto grave").

6. The annexation of the Falklands and its consequences

The escalation that occurred as a result of the "Davidoff incident" forced the Argentine dictators to make decisions that had an impact that went beyond the South Georgia incident. The British were by now sending more and more vessels to the South Atlantic, including a nuclear submarine. The members of the junta noted that such a strong militarization of the area would make it very difficult to make a surprise attack on the Falkland Islands, as the plan of annexation was based on British defense potential from before the Davidoff incident ("Declaración testimonial del teniente general (r.) d. Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri"). In view of the military's lack of faith in the possibility of a peaceful resolution of the territorial dispute, it only seemed a matter of time before orders would be given to invade the Falklands ("Anexo IV/5" 479). Indeed, the decision was made during the meeting of the military junta on 26 March 1982. Operation "Azúl", later renamed "Rosario" was to begin on 1 April 1982, with the possibility of postponing it by no more than two days ("Anexo IV/12" 528-529). The plan was still strictly confidential, privy only to selected members of the armed forces who would be directly involved in the operation. Interestingly, the Minister of the Economy Roberto Alemann was not among those who were consulted at any stage of the process of the plan's development. According to Alemann, he learned about Argentine intentions to reclaim the islands just a day before the military action began ("Declaración testimonial del Doctor Roberto Teodoro Alemann").

Due to the growing tension in Argentine-British relations, the UN Security Council called on both Argentina and the United Kingdom to refrain from using force or threats of force. However, the Argentine military decided to officially break off diplomatic talks. As a result, US President Ronald Reagan made a phone call to General Galtieri, asking him to reconsider his country's position. The military were not mistaken in assuming that the United States would want to neutralize the threat of war between its two allies at all costs (Caraballo et al 145-46). However, General Galtieri remained indifferent to the words of Reagan. The American president suggested that in the event of any potential conflict, the US would not be able to support

Argentina. Nevertheless, Galtieri did not construe his words as a warning not to attack the islands (Caraballo et al. 145-46).

According to the orders given by the junta, just after midnight on 2 April 1982, Argentine troops launched an invasion of the Falkland Islands. As the British had previously sent the HMS *Endurance* to South Georgia, the Falklands were practically undefended. According to Anderson (17), only 68 Marines and 25 members of the Local Defence Force were on hand to resist the Argentine attack. After a brief exchange of fire, they were forced to surrender. The representatives of British administration, headed by the Governor of the islands Rex Hunt, were sent to Montevideo, from where they were supposed to fly back to London. Meanwhile, the capital of the Falklands, Port Stanley, was renamed Puerto Argentino. The British Union Jack was replaced by the Argentine flag raised at Government House (CAERCAS 1983).

The retaking of the Falkland Islands led to enormous enthusiasm not only among the military, but also, for the first time since the beginning of the dictatorship, among Argentine society as a whole. People were hanging national flags in their windows and from their balconies, cheering, crowding the streets and gathering in front of the presidential palace, the *Casa Rosada*. Seeing the thousands of people cheering in recognition of the military junta only strengthened Galtieri in his conviction that the military operation to reclaim the Falklands was the right course of action. Both the president and the junta believed that they had once again fulfilled their duty to the state and united all Argentines in a common cause.

Although the military did not make the decision to invade the Falklands under the influence of society, its implementation led to a clear change in relations between the government and its citizens. The annexation of the archipelago and the accompanying excitement led to a situation in which, for the first time since seizing power, the military were forced to bend to the will of the Argentine people. The collective and deeply rooted sentiments of the Argentines which came to the fore as a result led to a change in the attitude of society. People who had so far been deprived of the right to freely express their opinion felt permitted not only to articulate their interests, but also to demand that they be acted upon. As the United States Secretary of State Alexander Haig rightly noted, "Galtieri's problem is that he has so excited the Argentine people that he has left himself little room for maneuver" ("Memorandum for the President, April 12, 1982"). His credibility as a political leader began to depend on the result of the decision to reclaim the Falklands. However, both Galtieri and other members of the junta were unaware of the deep political consequences of the annexation.

The British response to the annexation was an almost immediate decision to recapture the Falklands from Argentine occupation. Despite the attempts at mediation undertaken by the US Secretary of State Alexander Haig, war could not be avoided. Combat at sea and in the air started on 1 May 1982.

It should be recalled that at the time of planning the operation, the Argentine dictators had not prepared for the eventuality of a potential military response by the United Kingdom. Moreover, due to time constraints, the plans developed by the Joint Staff of the Argentine Armed Forces were not fully completed. Argentina found itself in a very difficult situation. Moreover, on 30 April 1982, the American National Security Council decided to abandon the US's neutrality with regard to the conflict and officially support the United Kingdom ("NSC Meeting Background Paper, Falklands Crisis"). Faced with the situation, and due to their lack of preparation

for war, the Argentines were forced to adopt the simplest possible strategy based on improvised courses of action. The plan was to inflict the heaviest possible losses on the United Kingdom in the air, and in case of the British landing on the Falklands, to defend its own positions at all costs ("Anexo VI/4" 1428-38; "Anexo VI/6" 1442-55; "Anexo VI/7" 1456-63; "Anexo VI/8" 1464-68).

The British landed on East Falkland on 20 May 1982 and immediately began to move inland. They subsequently crushed any resistance by the defending Argentines, who stood no chance against the more numerous and better equipped British forces. The final offensive on Puerto Argentino was launched on 11 June and ended in surrender by the Argentine forces on 14 June (CAERCAS 1983d, 1414-16). The Falklands War formally ended on 20 June when the Argentines were removed from the Thule base on South Sandwich. The *status quo ante bellum* was restored.

The political consequences of the annexation and subsequent war were the resignation of President Leopoldo Galtieri and the dissolution of the third military junta. However, it should be remembered that the humiliation of the Falklands Crisis led not only to a loss of credibility on the part of the military authorities, but also on the part of the armed forces as a whole. In other words, the loss of public confidence in the military resulted in a loss of confidence in the entire National Reorganization Process, which was based on the domination of the armed forces. Even the military ceased to believe that they could continue to rule – the task for the fourth junta was to call an election and prepare the state for the smooth transition to democracy. In the end, the decision to seize the Falklands indirectly contributed to the end of military rule in Argentina.

Furthermore, the use of force against the United Kingdom led to a significant deterioration of Argentina's image on the world stage. As Iglesias (109) points out, after the annexation, the Falkland Islanders lost any remaining positive image of Argentina they may have had, the United Kingdom ultimately rejected any possibility of sovereignty negotiations in the future, and the United Nations, whose resolutions had been favorable to Argentina in the past, adopted a more ambiguous position. Argentina became an isolated country, widely condemned for its actions, with no prospects for improvement of their position.

7. Conclusions

The paper indicates that the Argentine decision to reclaim the Falklands may be explained by taking into account the nationalist beliefs of the ruling dictators at the time. They believed that the archipelago was a national territory of Argentina that needed to be restored to the nation. For this reason, they did not perceive their annexation of the islands as an illegal act of aggression, but rather as a way to secure their sovereignty over an occupied territory. Therefore, from the point of view of the country's decision-makers, the use of force was a tool for fulfilling Argentina's national interests.

The article notes that the Argentine military interpreted impulses coming from the international community, especially the United Kingdom and the United States, with an ideological bias. As a result, they expected a different set of outcomes of their actions than those that actually occurred. They perceived taking back the islands

and presenting the British with a *fait accompli* as an effective way of solving the problem. A deep-seated belief that they were acting for the right reasons and that they had the support of the international community prevented the Argentine dictators from developing alternative scenarios. The documents available reveal that military did not assume that their actions would meet with any response from the British or international condemnation. For this reason, they were not prepared for the consequences at any level: strategic, military or operational.

A misperception of international relations as a result of ideological bias led the military to believe that the time to reclaim the islands had come. The article concludes that this decision was not taken under direct pressure from society. During the National Reorganization Process, society was not allowed to participate in governance – the military were the only group responsible for defining and achieving national goals. The analysis proves that the problem of the British presence on the Falklands was too important for the Argentines to use it as a tool to distract social attention. It should be remembered that preliminary plans for the occupation of islands had been prepared in military circles long before 1982. Similarly, there are no grounds to claim that the act of aggression against the United Kingdom was a sole response to the deteriorating economic situation of the state. The failure to inform Minister Alemann of the plans to invade the Falklands proves that the Argentine military did not know much about economic policy, and lacked an understanding of how political and economic change influence each other. Therefore, it is difficult to claim that the economic problems the country was experiencing could have been sufficient reason for the military to use force against another state.

The article observes that the consequences of annexation and the subsequent war went far beyond the Falklands issue itself, leading to long-term changes both on the domestic and international stage. The Argentine military's failure in the Falklands destroyed the myth of the "victorious armed forces", capable of protecting the Argentine people. It resulted in the removal of President Galtieri, who was replaced by General Reynaldo Bignone. It should be remembered, however, that the humiliation in the Falklands led not only to a loss of credibility on the part of military authorities, but also on the part of the system as a whole. As this article shows, the decision to seize the Falklands turned out to be one of the final nails in the coffin of the military government, indirectly contributing to the end of their rule.

Therefore, in the light of the considerations presented above, is reasonable to conclude that the nationalism of the Argentine military was not only one of the key factors behind the Falklands crisis, but also the one that contributed to the ultimate failure of the military regime, on both the domestic and the international front.

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